



TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE FOR THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

APRIL 1, 2015

IN OPPOSITION TO GOVERNOR'S S.B. 951 AN ACT CONSOLIDATING CRIMINAL JUSTICE, JUVENILE AND FAMILY SERVICE PROGRAMS

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Lara Herscovitch; I am the deputy director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to stopping the criminalization of Connecticut's children. We work to reduce the number of youth who enter the juvenile justice system and ensure it is safe, fair and effective for those who are involved. In alignment with that mission, **the Alliance strongly opposes the Governor's proposal in SB 951 *An Act Consolidating Criminal Justice, Juvenile and Family Service Program* to move the juvenile justice functions of the Judicial Branch to the Department of Children and Families (DCF).**

The Judicial Branch and its Court Support Services Division (CSSD) is responsible for 97% of the juvenile justice system. Its successful reform and leadership of that system is achieving great outcomes and saving the state significant amounts of money. In short, we are safer today and are spending less money on juvenile crime. This proposal would dismantle the system that brought us those benefits.

Youth crime has been dropping in Connecticut for years. Even after "Raise the Age," when the state added most 16- and 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system (they used to be handled exclusively in the *adult* criminal justice system), the number of referrals into the juvenile justice system has not increased.¹ Because of this, there also have been significant cost savings: even with the addition of 16 and 17 year-olds, Connecticut spent \$2 million less on juvenile justice than it had a decade earlier.

SUNY Albany is in the process of evaluating the Raise the Age change in CT. Comparing samples from 2009 (16-year-olds treated as adults), and 2010 (16-year-olds treated as juveniles), the 16-year-olds processed as juveniles are about 38% less likely to be re-arrested in the two-year follow-up compared with those processed as adults in the prior year.²

National best practice is moving to juvenile justice systems that focus on in-home and community-based services. CSSD is responsible for moving the state in this direction, serving 97% of the youth who enter the system. CSSD runs detention as well as a host of programs that hold children accountable while supervising them in the community. It has also developed strategies to divert kids from the system entirely when appropriate.

DCF, on the other hand, is responsible for 3% of our juvenile justice population, the youth who receive *out-of-home* placement and incarceration. DCF's area of expertise and specialization in juvenile justice is the *opposite* of what the state needs in order to continue

¹ Connecticut Office of Policy and Management, "Facts and Figures of Connecticut's Juvenile Justice System," <http://www.ct.gov/opm/cwp/view.asp?a=2974&q=471654>

² Kurlychek, M. and Fowler, E. University of Albany, *Preliminary Draft Raise the Age: Evaluating Connecticut's Experience*. Preliminary Draft. Presented to Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, February 11, 2014. P. 10

achieving the positive outcomes for public safety and youth (smaller system, lower recidivism). In short, DCF is not best equipped to run our juvenile justice system.

Another critical feature of a successful justice system is accountability, data-driven decisions, and a commitment to continuous quality improvement. CSSD fits this profile. It rigorously collects and analyzes program- and system-level data; as a whole, it is committed to continuous feedback and reform. This culture and these systems, in turn, lead to successful programs and outcomes, reduced recidivism, and cost savings.

DCF, on the other hand, is not near this stage of organizational development. When consultants from Georgetown University attempted to analyze DCF's juvenile parole practices, they concluded:

“The DCF-JSD [Juvenile Services Division] was able to provide some data for the report, however the level of data required for in-depth system analysis was unavailable. The information that appears in this report was cobbled together from various sources. It took substantial time and effort to assemble even the most basic data. This is a significant systems limitation. It is impossible to establish or manage a modern data-driven parole system without valid and reliable data.”³

Though we know that DCF has worked to improve its data collection and reporting since the Georgetown report came out 21 months ago, it still does not have the experience, capacity, nor culture required.

Connecticut has been lauded nationally for its successful, innovative juvenile justice reform over the past decade, and for the significant, positive outcomes the reform has created. Moving the juvenile justice functions of CSSD to DCF would put those major strides at serious risk, including public safety (reduced recidivism), financial savings, and better youth and family outcomes. DCF is well equipped for certain jobs; taking on the remaining 97% of juvenile justice is not among them. If the administration of our juvenile justice system is not only not broken but is achieving significant gains, then please - let us not “fix” it.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Alliance member organizations: AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice, CHDI, Connecticut Junior Republic, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, LifeBridge Community Services, NAMI Connecticut, Keep the Promise Coalition, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children

³Kelly, Howell & Johnson, Comprehensive Strategy Group and National Council on Crime and Delinquency, *Final Report for State of Connecticut, Department of Children and Families, June 2013*, Executive Summary, p. iii.